

The Doc Said. . .

By Lt. Paul Berthelotte

Dehydration is normally a threat when you are sweating heavily, either from work or exercising. However, did you know that other factors, such as medication and illness can also lead to dehydration?

Medication. While on the parade deck getting ready for morning PT, a Marine started shaking and became weak. He was immediately taken to the nearest hospital, where he was diagnosed with severe dehydration and an electrolyte imbalance. He had been taking a drug for his upper-respiratory infection that had this warning on it: "Take with plenty of water." This warning didn't mean to drink water while swallowing the pills; it meant that the drug may cause dehydration.

When you are taking medication and doing hard work or physical training, you have to force yourself to take in more water than you normally do.

Marines know to hydrate during the hot and humid months, but they often don't know that winter training has its fair share of dehydration casualties. It's deceiving, so leaders have to supervise more closely.

Here are a few suggestions: Avoid diuretics like caffeine and alcohol before heavy physical activity, because they dehydrate you. Marines should take sips, at least two to four ounces every 15 to 30 minutes. As your activity becomes more strenuous, you'll have to take in more water.

Illness. Personnel inspections are a given part of any military unit. These require long periods of standing, either at attention or parade rest. If the day is hot and humid, you usually can count on someone falling out if they haven't been drinking enough water.

A young Marine was part of such an event when he passed out. What was unusual was that the day was cool, 55 degrees, and it was early in the morning (0745). He didn't take into account, however, that he had been sick with the flu.

Between his medication and his flu symptoms, he had lost a lot of water. Because he didn't drink enough fluids during his illness and the night before the inspection, he almost guaranteed he would faint. He ended up with a fractured jaw, three days in the hospital, and 30 days convalescent leave.

In a similar case, a staff sergeant passed out on the parade deck during a retirement ceremony. His injuries were more severe; he broke his jaw, punctured his eardrum, cut his face, and loosened nine teeth.

With their jaws wired shut, these two victims will only be able to consume liquids now.

If you're a Marine taking medication, keep your NCO informed. If you're an NCO or SNCO, make sure you know the side effects of the medications your Marines are taking. Know their performance limitations too. If you're unsure, ask the doc. ☘

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